Framing Block 19 Bonegilla for tourist and local visitors

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Abstract

A Victorian Government regional tourism initiative boosted opportunities for winning conservation and interpretation funding for the former Bonegilla Migrant Reception Centre at the end of 2005. Two years later the Commonwealth Government added the site to the National Heritage List.

This paper examines the new challenges of interpreting the site as a commemoratory centre and tourism venue in the wake of these developments. It explores ways of matching the stories to be told and the means to tell them with changing visitor expectations. It tells how a small volunteer organisation is trying to secure and demonstrate sufficient visitor numbers to justify further public funding on much-needed conservation work while still focusing primarily on increasing understanding of a national commemoratory centre.

Introduction

In 1947 the Bonegilla Army Camp, which had been hastily erected in 1940, was turned into a migrant reception centre. Bonegilla was to become the largest and longest-lived reception centre in post-war Australia, taking in and processing over 300,000 new arrivals before it closed in 1971. During the 1970s the Army demolished most of the buildings to make way for Latchford Barracks where it was to train army apprentices. Twenty-four huts in Block 19 were saved from redevelopment when they were placed on the Register of the National Estate shortly after a large migrant reunion in 1987. The Army agreed to pass ownership from the Commonwealth to the State of Victoria and the place was put on to the state heritage register in 2002. New challenges to interpretation emerged when in 2005 the state government set up the site as a commemoratory centre and tourist venue, and again in December 2007 when the Commonwealth Government added the site to the National Heritage List. In just over twenty years, Block 19 emerged from being a collection of underused and neglected army huts to a government sanctioned heritage site of ‘outstanding’ importance.

Ultimately, heritage listing in itself is a resource-neutral government decision, however the Victorian government was sympathetic to conserving the site. In 2004-5 Steve Bracks’ Government committed A$2 million to Block 19 Bonegilla, principally at the urging of its Tourism Minister, John Pandazopoulos, who had Bonegilla family connections. Such public spending was justified as a regional tourism initiative, ‘the project will provide members of the local community with new recreation space’ (Batchelor 2004). The conservation of this commemoratory site involved establishing and developing a tourism venue.

This paper examines the challenges of interpreting the 24 army huts remnant of the reception centre as a heritage site and tourism venue that attracts sufficient visitor numbers to justify public expenditure. It explains attempts to foster local community ownership of the heritage site by retelling the stories of Bonegilla’s place in the development of Wodonga and the border district. In doing so it discusses historical argument in a heritage context and echoes Shirley Fitzgerald’s call (2005) for historian involvement in heritage interpretation. As a local historian I acknowledge that the emphasis on the role of historians may appear to be special pleading. I should also make plain that I speak only as a member of the small group of volunteers who comprise the Bonegilla Migrant Experience Heritage Park Steering Committee and not for the committee as a whole. These views are mine.

In explaining the story of development of an exhibition for the Australian Workers Heritage Centre at Barcaldine, Brian Crozier and Helen Gregory (2003) reflect on the process of history-making for museums. Stories, they say, vary according to the settings in which they are told. Storytellers crafting histories delivered in museums work similarly yet differently from text-based historians. Crozier and Gregory argue that teams involving historians, curators and exhibition designers orientate their inquiries towards the end-task of engaging readers through exhibition experiences. They, therefore, work principally with displayable materials. They anticipate museum visitors to have expectations that are different from those of book readers, especially with regard to striking balances between present and past. They suggest that museums deal ‘directly with perhaps the most extensive and diverse audiences of all’ (Crozier 2000:2).

The tasks of preparing Block 19 for tourists and fostering local involvement in managing and promoting the site prompt similar reflection on the ways of telling stories with and about the historic environment. That is not to say that history-making with heritage differs greatly from history-making in museums. Except heritage history is often shaped within an advocacy mode. There are no velvet ropes marking off heritage sites. The first challenge for heritage practitioners is to win notice. People have to be enticed to look again at a familiar place or to approach an out-of-sight, out-of-mind heritage place. This may not be easy as audiences are even more diverse than those who visit museums. Further, heritage sites and buildings are often in danger of disappearing. Heritage practitioners frequently become place champions trying to win conservation funding. At Bonegilla they used the wiles of public advocacy to have the place saved from destruction in 1987-8 and then placed on state and national heritage lists (Miller 1988; Sluga 1988; Daniell 1996; Freeman & Daniell 1999; Hutchison 2004; Tündem-Smith 2007). With community group support they helped win funds for protecting its fragile buildings. Without their advocacy and that of the former centre residents Bonegilla would not have been saved.

Significance

The professional touchstones, guidelines and advice used by heritage practitioners insist on conveying significance as the way to ‘provoke interest and reflection’ that will engage visitors.
and ‘enhance understanding and enjoyment’ (Lawson & Walker 2006:4-5; Truscott 2004; Young 1995; Winkworth 2005). They offer guidance on unravelling and presenting the stories of sites and buildings. What caused this place? Where and what time is it? What do the buildings tell us about the people who built them, lived and worked in them? Did the buildings or the living and the working change over time? How have and do people feel about the place? Does it add to our understanding of the community, the nation or ourselves? How might a reader be encouraged to look closely and to reflect on its meaning?

With the National Heritage listing, Block 19 has become part of the narrative of nation; a must-visit place on any grand tour of historic Australia. A two metre plinth declares the place to be ‘a symbol of post-war migration which transformed Australia’s economy, society and culture’. Block 19 has survived as a rare but representative example of post-war migrant accommodation camps. It was distinctive not only because it was large and long-lasting, but also for its close association with a major shift in immigration policy. Bonegilla was one of a few places to focus on the reception of migrants and refugees drawn from non-English speaking European countries. It was this post-war shift from prioritising Anglo-Celtic sources that transformed political and social expectations of cultural diversity in Australia. Bonegilla represents the beginnings of a mass migration that was traumatic for the host society as well as the newcomers. It prompts reflection on national responses to immigrants and raises questions about how Australia went about getting taking in strangers.

The National Heritage Listing argues that Bonegilla and its associated oral and written records yield insights into post-war immigration and refugee experiences. This focus on experience is borne out in the naming of the area in which Block 19 is located as the ‘Bonegilla Migrant Experience Heritage Park’. It reflects a shift in historical interest from immigration policies to people experiences (Jupp 1990).

Bonegilla is a special place for many people. Writing about 1988, historian Glenda Sluga tapped the memory of former residents. She recognised that Bonegilla offered the memory of the displaced a solidity of place - an ‘antidote to rootlessness’. She foresaw migrants reclaiming the place as their shared autobiographical moment, their ‘Bon-a-gilla’ rather than the official ‘Bonegilla’.2 Over time, the former residents have established a large repository of their memory pieces in the Bonegilla Collection at what is now the Albury Library Museum.3 Their objects, photographs and memory fragments extend stories culled from the large and much-prized immigration administration records held at the National Archives of Australia. Their Bonegilla Collection provides views of the arrival and early settlement processes from the vantage points of reception centre residents. Together, the Block 19 site, the Bonegilla Collection and the extensive reception centre and Immigration Department administrative records held at the National Australian Archives, form a triptych that reveals the post-war migrant and refugee experience from differing and complementary angles.

**Visitors**

Prior to the establishment of a commemorative centre and tourism venue at the end of 2005, nearly all of the site and museum visitors were pilgrims. Former residents made return visits or their children came ‘to place their parents as well as their own lives in a historical context’ (Sluga 1989:159). Interpretation and promotion were event-led, with ethnic organisation based festivals, principally involving dance, music and food, every few years. There was a steady dribble of visitors to the Albury Regional Museum which produced From the Steps of Bonegilla, a successful travelling exhibition in 2001. Their comments in the museum personal history data base and in the site visitor books reveal the power of place. They come to tell rather than be told.

Naturally the former residents and their descendants sought and still seek something of their own or something related to the companionships they formed with people in similar positions. Some of our most frequent inquiries have been family-history based and have a simple, narrow name-search focus. This is not surprising. As interest in family history has grown, the National Australian Archives reports public demand is greatest, first, for its war service records and, then, for its immigration records. We cannot help with person searches, but at Bonegilla visitors can locate private stories in a larger collective.

We expect tourists to have different expectations from pilgrims. An interpretation centre and café were built with the $2 million supplied by the Victoria Government in 2005. A static interpretation centre and information panels goes some way to meeting the needs of everyday visitors, many of whom may have no connection with the site. The long pavilion echoes the journey to and through Bonegilla. Visitors pass by a wall of immigrant voices. They see a wall of immigrant faces. They can watch a 20-minute film clip explaining the background to post-war migrant migration and depicting some scenes from the reception centre when it was operating. A pamphlet provides a self-guided tour around the locked huts. Beyond the pavilion there is a cluster of sculptured silhouette figures. A mass hall exhibition on the Dutch experience of Bonegilla is opened on prior request. A web site and interpretive pamphlets are used for off-site interpretation and promotion.4

We expect tourists to differ in their approaches to the site. They may come to enjoy ‘tea in the warm parlour of the past’ and to congratulate themselves and the nation on the achievement of multiculturalism (Samuel 1985; Urry 1990). Visitor book comments show that many come to pay tribute to the sacrifices made by their parents. Some still want to affirm their decision to migrate. Nearly all want to endorse Bonegilla as a difficult place of transition. Bonegilla won a great deal of unfavourable public notice on at least three occasions. In 1949 thirteen newly-arrived children died from malnutrition. In July 1952 and again in July 1961 there were violent demonstrations when assisted migrants grew distressed at not being offered jobs and having to stay at the reception centre for many months because of downturns in the national economy. Bonegilla could be a ‘place of no hope’; ‘my parents hated it and were treated badly’; ‘I don’t have good memories’; it was ‘Boney-bloody-gilla’.

We expect tourists to look for contemporary resonances and ask uncomfortable present-day questions about immigration. Some of the visitors to the museum or the site have used the comments pages in visitors’ books to rail against detention centres for asylum seekers or contentious citizenship tests. It is tempting to magnify the importance of the present to the past, but like other historians, those dealing with heritage act as auditors to see current pieces are not imposed on past. At Bonegilla, the historians involved with interpretation are anxious not to confuse remembering with self congratulation. Nor do they want to project backwards current debates about the
treatment of uninvited refugees or current anxieties about multiculturalism. All the same, there is no shying away from a prickly if not a hot interpretation of immigration (Uzzell 1989). We revisit the difficulties facing post-war migrants that foreshadowed on-going and current debates about social inclusion and newcomer well-being, especially with regard to the provision of initial support, housing and meaningful work.

We are not afraid to ask how well the nation went about receiving and training its newcomers. Why have the 1952 and 1961 riots become ‘silenced Eurekas’? (Sluga 1989:154) Tourists expect challenge. The thrust of our interpretative stories is not only about the migrant and refugee experience of arrival and settlement, but also about the nation’s role in reception and training. The questions prompted by these stories morph into modern day equivalents. What is the current migrant and refugee experience of arrival and settlement? How are they received and trained? How does government try to keep the nation favourably disposed towards migration? The balance between past and present is a fine one.

At Bonegilla we are well aware that tourists may not come at all. Indeed, the central challenge at Bonegilla is to sell the site and its history. The 120-seat café/restaurant built in 2005 remains unleased. Many of the entries in the visitor book are still from pilgrims and their families. We do not yet seem to have attracted many of the grey nomads that ply the Hume Highway. The regional tourism body is supportive. We find some encouragement in connecting with the young who use the site as an educational resource. But perhaps for tourists and for locals the post-war immigrants still remain the ‘other’. Even sixty years on, Bonegilla is their story, not our story. Some people might dispute the prestige we give migrant memory. Our invitation to visit has to be inclusive, aimed at the host society as well as those who were newcomers.

Fostering local community ownership and involvement

The National Heritage listing does not address local significance. Yet it is an understanding of the importance of the site to local development that attracts local commitment to custodianship. It is important for border district residents to understand Bonegilla as part of the story of the development of this area as well as the nation. War-time and post-war contemporaries expounded on the economic stimulus to the local district’s economy of having to cater for the thousands housed, first, in the Bonegilla Camp, and then, in the Bonegilla Reception Centre. They expressed unease at the scaling back of military activity and the closing of the reception centre. They went further and explained what they saw as the social and cultural impact on local community of the military and more importantly, the migrant presence. The thematic histories for the heritage studies of both Albury and Wodonga used such contemporary perceptions as evidence of the significance of Bonegilla to the development of both places (Pennay 2003 and 2004).

Place references to the impact of Bonegilla on local development are plainly located off-site and lie more often in local memory than with tangible relics. There are, however, tangible memory triggers in school honours boards, enamelled portraits on local grave stones, the Sacred Heart church memorial window showing the Holy Family making its way towards a Southern Cross and the street names of one subdivision (namely Prague, Riga, Athens, Belgrade for example). There is little evidence now of the crude shacks peniless migrants built on Wodonga Flats or at Killara (‘Little Russia’). Only memory maps point to the factories that were important to Wodonga’s manufacturing development and where migrant women made up the bulk of the workforce. Similar memory maps point to the shrewdly named Corroboree café with its Continental ambience and real coffee, to the continental meat shops run by Peters and Grabbe and to Stan Farmer’s delicatessen that sold rye bread, liverwurst and Russian liqueur chocolates. Perhaps even less demonstrable are the memories of local responses to migrant clothes, hairstyles and manners. It is still possible to elicit from local residents stories of linguistic adventures in dealing with an employee/customer/neighbour still learning English (Pennay 2001 pp. 8-10, 34-38).

Bonegilla had a profound impact not only on the local economy but also on social and cultural development. Town boosters even claim the migrant presence touched the character of the place. From June 1999 to April 2000 nearby Bandiana became temporary accommodation to refugees from Kosovo. The Mayor, Graham Crapp, boasted that the newcomers had come ‘to a city which had 50 years experience in looking after newcomers to Australia, a city which I think is one of the most caring and concerned in Australia’ (Border Mail 1999).

Telling Bonegilla Reception Centre Stories

The tourists that come to Block 19 Bonegilla may expect museum gadgetry that will entertain rather than an Army Camp ghost town of corrugated iron huts presented in the condition in which they were left by their last occupants. The migrants’ words are important, but interpretation can easily become text-heavy. Plainly, visitors find visual evidence comparatively easy to access and process. The migrants’ photographs convey senses of time and place. Further, the juxtaposition of official and unofficial images and words sharpens the story telling. Laundry experiences illustrate the point: in one photograph a publicist showed a happy group of women talking cheerfully over wash tubs; whereas in another a migrant had two young women scrubbing grimly in the communal laundries.

New media offer a wide range of opportunities in presenting memory fragments and images to enliven accounts of arrival and settlement experiences. The Migration Heritage Centre has included the stories of Bonegilla residents on its Belongings web site. We are looking to constructing a virtual tour tracing journeys through Bonegilla via animation and a web-based photographic album. At the site itself, we may stay with the bold approach of presenting empty rooms with minimum display materials and using art installations similar to those already in place. Migrant recollections of arrival and first days in a new country are often couched in sensory terms with which visitors can readily make connection (Clark 2002; Thomas 2005). Creatively constructed video clips can help place individual stories into larger frames in interesting ways (Thomas 2008).

At the site we open wide and invite people to come inside, because there are stories to tell and people as well. Indeed, almost an embarrassment of stories and people. Border Mail journalist Howard Jones (1991) asked “where do you start with 320,000 human stories?” Any interpretation has to make a start with those many voices, for, as Michael Frisch’s (1990:176) cartoon character insists on testing the authority of a storyteller, “Vos you der Chollie?”. We have to decide what it is that the many voices tell us and how best to use them.
At Bonegilla, historians play a central role in story telling. They are closely acquainted with the voices of those who had direct association with the place. They have delved in the large archival bases and help with accessing and selecting the key witnesses and the most telling images. Further, Bonegilla stories are part of living memory, and it is the historians who have the skills to make sense of the memory fragments that have accumulated in the museum, in the site visitor books, in the self-published memoirs, family histories and on the web. This wrestling with diverse participant accounts and memory pieces is not unusual fare for historians. Bill Gammage (1974) showed how to use diaries and letters to construct a military history that had great appeal. Working a similar topic, Bruce Scates (2006) explores shards of memory at modern-day Gallipoli. Michael Frisch (1990) uses oral history to explain Ellis Island as a heritage site. Historians are experienced in listening to and making some sense of the ‘murmuring of innumerable lives’. John Bodnar (1992) and, the geographer, David Lowenthal (1998) explore personal, collective, vernacular and official legacies.

Several themes unlock site meanings and help discipline detail. Three examples suffice. First, consider the ways location and fabric framed arrival experiences. Like the 300,000 newcomers before them, visitors ask where and what is this place? Bonegilla was isolated and big. Accommodation was basic. It was tucked away on the southern bank of Lake Hume, 12km from Wodonga, over 300km from Melbourne and 600km from Sydney. Bonegilla had its own churches, banks, sporting fields, cinema, hospital, police station and railway platform. At one time the reception and training centre could cope with up to 7,700 people and an additional 1,000 in tents, if need be. The bleakly named Block 19 points to what were 23 similarly sized and constituted bleak blocks on the 240ha site. The buildings were mostly standard army-type huts, usually unlined, timber-framed huts with corrugated iron cladding and low-pitched, gabled roofs. They were commonly meant to accommodate twenty men and had no internal partitions. Little was done to prepare the facilities for accommodating migrants in 1947. From 1950 on the huts were divided into cubby-hole sized cubicles each slightly less than 4m by 3m so as to give some privacy. After 1953 there were attempts to soften the surrounds with trees and gardens. From the beginning, taxpayers were reassured about the thrift of the reception and training operations: the accommodation was ‘only reasonably comfortable’; the food plain, though nutritious and plentiful; there was neither luxury nor squalor; all expenditure was carefully monitored (BMM 1949). Immigration authorities wanted sparse migrant accommodation places ‘so that the urge of the occupants will be to vacate as soon as full family life can be established elsewhere’ (IAC 1950).

The unpeopled spaces of Bonegilla were ideal for their original purpose of military training. Subsequently the river and the open paddocks provided opportunity for newcomers to familiarise themselves with their new country. It was on long walks about Bonegilla that they came to understandings of a physical setting in which non-metropolitan, inland Australians lived. This was Australia - a hot summer sun in a huge sky or cold winter nights in unlined and unheated huts. The physical isolation of Bonegilla and the nature of the accommodation provided may have strengthened the pressure on migrants to take up employment offers.

The empty paddock surrounds survive. The huts divided into cubicles, an old camp wire-based bed, industrial-sized cooking utensils and servery and the communal ablutions block remain to testify to the rudimentary nature of the accommodation provided. Anne Hawker, from The Netherlands in 1952, remembers ‘we were allocated our two little rooms, which were as sparse as could be. Naked little light bulb, no heating of any sort and the beds were soldier’s beds, chicken wire beds, with black blankets and our luggage had not yet arrived’ (Hawker 2007). Giovanni Sgro (Loh 1980:47) from Italy in 1952, tells...
how young Italians whiled away the time betting a penny for the first to walk to and then from Albury. Children remember, the flies, rabbits, ants, possums, spiders and snakes. And ‘mother crying’. Everyone remembers the food, especially the mutton (Pennay 2007a and b).

At Bonegilla fabric analysis requires the visitor to move beyond using architectural style codes such as Federation or Californian Bungalow. The architecture of Bonegilla invites comparison with other army structures, other shared dwellings and the accommodation alternatives in the wider community (Miller 2007; O’Hanlon 2005). In the post-war years it was not uncommon for suburban pioneers to live in a garage while they erected a house at the front. The post-war period, as many a former Bonegilla resident will tell, was the age of the concrete mixer and home-made bricks. It was the time of housing shortages and raw housing settlements. The deep-pit latrines at Bonegilla were unpleasant, but there were no sewerage connections for the houses in nearby Wodonga and Lavington. Material fabric springs from and reflects social fabric. Temporal as well as location and fabric analysis is required. Heritage historians slip easily from cries of ‘location, location, location’ to ‘context, context, context’ (Fitzgerald 2005:58).

Another theme – finding work - helps make sense of the ways people’s experiences of Bonegilla were structured. Migrant labour was a prime consideration of the reception centre. The immigrants were welcomed as a ‘directable and controllable pool of labour’ that would be crucial in post-war reconstruction. At Bonegilla they were provided with temporary accommodation, learned some English and attended ‘interviews to determine employment potential’ before they were dispatched to jobs where they were needed Australia-wide and where they would work out the two-year contracts they had signed. For migrants the most important event in their life at Bonegilla was the job interview. For the nation the expanded workforce the migrants provided was vital for national development.

Marie Ashley, who taught English, was reminded by a student of the mantra ‘No English No Job’ (Carrington 1997:16). Beyond but from Bonegilla there is Dr Karl Kruszelnicki’s story of his father who was sent to a job with the Sydney Water Board where he stayed for the rest of his working life (NAA 2008). Egon Kunz (1975) has given an account of how refugee doctors fared when their medical qualifications and experience were not recognised. The doctors were some of many professionals that the poet Les Murray depicted as destined to learn ‘fresh start music… physicians nailing crates, attorneys cleaning trams’ (Sluga 1989:157).

Other stories relate to Bonegilla as a workplace. They show how the place operated. At any one time up to 400 migrants were employed at Bonegilla in a variety of occupations, for example, kitchen, garden, hospital, transport, recreation or office staff. Employment at the reception centre was always a good option. Public Service conditions ensured reasonable security, pay, working conditions, prospects of overtime and promotion. Staff had privileged accommodation and rations. Many stayed at Bonegilla for years.

A third interpretative theme focuses on the ‘non-British’ nature of the immigrant groups. The non-British were never as acceptable as the British who already had the language and whose work qualifications were recognised. Officials expected only the non-British to endure family separation when accommodation grew tight. Women and children were sent from Bonegilla to Holding Centres at Uranquinty, Benalla or Cowra when there was only room for those in jobs. At Bonegilla the non-British were to learn English and receive instruction on the Australian way of life. They would become familiar with coinage, imperial measures, Australian geography, history and standards of hygiene. They would be encouraged to engage with local Australians and ‘to take their place in the community’. Bonegilla was to provide the very first steps in turning New Australians into true Australians.

There is show-and-tell for the concept of assimilation that prevailed in the years Bonegilla was operational. It is possible to show that non-British migrants were expected to become acquainted with the history and heritage of a British-Australia. Publicist and migrant photographs show Union Jacks were as ubiquitous as the Australian Ensign. Both the Coronation and the Royal Tour were major celebratory events at Bonegilla. There were framed photographs of the Queen in most of the public spaces. Elaborate oil portraits of early British monarchs, heraldry banners and shields were displayed in a mock Tudor setting in a recreation building dubbed ‘Tudor Hall’.

People stories related to assimilation include those of the Guinn family. Colonel Henry Guinn, Director of the Centre from 1954 to 1964, encouraged residents to engage with the local community through competitive sports, concerts, handicraft and cooking displays. Assimilation, he thought, involved building acquaintance and friendships between people of all nationalities and between hosts and newcomers. Barbara, his second daughter married Dino Glerean, an Italian immigrant. His wife facetiously explained that the family enjoyed the spaghetti Dino cooked as he had learnt to avoid garlic. More seriously she expressed unease about the ways in which women from some nationalities at Bonegilla seemed to adopt subservient roles. They chopped the wood, cleaned the men’s shoes and walked behind their husbands. Assimilation, Henry Guinn explained, was a long process that involved the community at large. A reception centre could only make a start (Guinn 1967).
Such explanatory themes provide storylines and images that convey the feel of time and place. They put place and residents into context. They can carry historical argument at the memory place. Whether these themes and/or the means used to present them have sufficient pull to attract and hold tourist attention remains to be seen. In the meantime our new café building stands empty as if in rebuke. Thus far we even fall short of that old heritage site development jibe – ‘Welcome to a nice café with Old Parliament House or Former Migrant Centre attached’. We do not yet seem to have met the challenge of capturing the imagination like other national sites such as Port Arthur, Eureka and Glenrowan. Perhaps the Migrant Experience will never match visitor predilections for Bushranger, Convict, Gold, Crocodile and Dinosaur Experiences.

The National Heritage listing has excited new levels of interest. Albury City Council, through its Cultural Services Director, promotes and researches its Bonegilla Collection with renewed vigour; Wodonga City Council, at the instigation of its Director of Investment Attraction, is looking at becoming involved in site management. This local government interest is vital to the future well-being and promotion of the heritage park.

The local media has always given generous coverage to Bonegilla reunions and festivals and to the stories of former residents. Bonegilla’s place in the development of the border district seems to have become widely acknowledged. A sure sign of local embrace of the heritage site will come when locals include a visit to Block 19 in the tours they give family visitors. Those visits will show that the nation’s Bonegilla is also Albury-Wodonga’s Bonegilla.

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Endnotes

1 Earlier versions of this paper, prior to the National Heritage listing, were presented at the annual conference of the Royal Australian Historical Society (NSW) and to the Albury & District Historical Society in July and September 2004. I thank Meredith Walker for her comments.

2 The ABC's Standing Committee on Spoken English advises that '/bohn-GIL-uh/' is the pronunciation for Bonegilla, the town and army base, but that when referring to the migrant hostel the name should be pronounced [bon-uh-GIL-un] because that's how the migrants pronounced the name'.

3 They were given a great deal of encouragement by a succession of museum directors Martyn Paxton, Vicki Northey, Helen Pithie and especially Elizabeth Close.


5 The Bonegilla Collection contains over 20 sustained interviews; 357 personal history data base entries; over 500 short memory pieces and 642 data based photographs. There are 919 images on Picture Australia that feature Bonegilla in the caption. The National Australian Archives Record Search has 3 562 record hits on Bonegilla. They include reception centre administrative records.